

STATE OF THE COUNTY
FEBRUARY 3, 2005
SHEILA AND HUGHES POTIKER THEATRE, LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE, UCSD

Ladies and gentlemen, honorable colleagues. Good evening and welcome to the 57th annual State of the County address.

I am honored to speak with you this evening as chairwoman of the county Board of Supervisors.

I want to thank the board of directors of the La Jolla Playhouse for allowing me the opportunity to conduct the 2005 State of the County address in their new theater.

As you can see on the program, this is one of the very first events to be held at the Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theatre.

This facility is cutting edge, representing the imagination and the vision that is the San Diego County. For each new production, the theater adapts. By its very design it encourages imagination.

It is that same imagination and vision that will help county government face the challenges ahead.

San Diego County used to be America's best kept secret. But more than 50,000 people move here each year. They bring cars and housing needs, putting pressure on our quality of life.

When I travel I read the local newspapers. If you do the same, you know that the headlines are amazingly similar. Other counties face the same challenges we do. We all need better roads, freeways, and transportation choices. We all need more affordable housing, clean water, and beaches.

We must have sheriff's protection, more open space, and parks for our children.

And of course, pocketbook issues, like good jobs, are critical.

For some governments, balancing a budget means shifting dollars from one fund to another.

Good management by this Board of Supervisors has produced a different result.

Every year we adopt a balanced budget and a reserve fund.

According to Standard & Poors, our financial outlook is bright. San Diego County, and I quote:

"Exhibits strong credit characteristics, moderate debt burden, and a track record of consistently strong financial management."

Although state cutbacks will make it difficult, let me assure you that I intend to preside over a fiscally sound county. This board will protect taxpayer dollars. We will provide the very best services possible. We represent you, the taxpayers, and we are here to work for you.

Here's what I pledge to do:

Despite tough times, the county will balance its budget.

We will maintain the most prudent reserve possible.

We will carry out the principles of the General Management System. That system details each department's strategic objectives – and the resources required to achieve them. This board holds every department strictly accountable to the plan.

To produce better service, we will continue to invest in our infrastructure, information technology, and our employees. We will fight for more money for roads, freeways, libraries, open space, and parks.

We will continue to provide the very best public protection.

I will do my part to keep our economy strong. I will defend our military bases to make certain that decision-makers in Washington, D.C. do not attempt to close any of them.

Our bases mean jobs and have a \$23 billion impact on our economy. Our military is an asset to our region, and I am honored to have them as neighbors. I am not willing to give them up for any reason.

Additionally, I call upon the president to appoint a Californian to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to protect San Diego County's interests.

I will now outline my other goals for the future – initiatives in the areas of traffic relief, health, environmental protection, financial stability, and my personal passion – the arts.

To get things done in tough fiscal times, we must communicate better and adopt innovation, especially when we talk about transportation solutions.

Traffic in San Diego County is getting worse, not better.

I authored the Parkway Plan for North County, jump-started SR56 with \$20 million in county funds, and voted to direct more than \$110 million to make improvements to I-15 and I-5.

But until we get serious about employee ride sharing, staggered work hours, and rescheduling truck deliveries to avoid peak hour commutes, traffic will only get worse.

We have 180,000 businesses in San Diego County.

The largest 25 companies employ almost 200,000. I am asking these employers to join me in a televised summit to work together to alleviate traffic.

It's appropriate that the San Diego Association of Governments presents its TransNet plan at this summit. Perhaps with a firsthand look at the plan employers can help us with trouble spots by modifying their traffic patterns. The summit will be held on April 27 at the Board of Supervisors' chambers, downtown.

At that summit we will receive a presentation about a ride share program that businesses region-wide can download on their computers. It is called CARS: Commuter Activated Ride Sharing. At their convenience, employees can sit at their desks, scan a zip code, then make contact to arrange a ride share. Even a few days a week, ridesharing alleviates traffic.

Implementing the CARS program for the county's 17,000 employees is the best way to start.

Also, I will support Vice Chairman Bill Horn's efforts to expedite Highway 76 and Supervisor Dianne Jacob's work to complete Highway 52. Both supervisors have long championed completion of those roads.

And we must build a northbound ramp from SR56 onto I-5. As the board's representative on SANDAG, I will work hard to complete much needed transportation projects using TransNet funds. The voters have spoken, and now we must spend their money wisely.

Tonight, I'd like to announce that with Vice Chairman Horn I will co-host a meeting in which we pull together the mayors in our districts for the express purpose of agreeing upon priorities we can all work toward. For instance, freeway improvements in North County.

As you know, to have a good quality of life you must safeguard your health. With a budget of \$1.4 billion, our Health and Human Services manages 600 contracts, administers 200 health and social services programs serving 300,000 people. Of that number, more than 40,000 are children.

This year as part of my Health Initiative, I will look for ways to promote healthy children. Let's talk first about doing our part to end childhood obesity.

The sad truth is that teenagers in the United States have higher rates of obesity than in 14 other industrialized nations.

In San Diego County alone there are an estimated 125,000 overweight children.

Obesity causes hypertension, is associated with Type II diabetes, and increases the risk of coronary heart disease.

Supervisor Ron Roberts and I co-sponsored legislation to fight childhood obesity. We partnered with the Coalition on Children and Weight to create a Childhood Obesity Master Plan with our schools.

The master plan will come back to the Board of Supervisors for adoption sometime this summer. Supervisor Roberts and I will help to bring their recommendations to the forefront.

In Rancho Bernardo we will promote healthy lifestyles by hosting a School Healthy Food Summit. The Coalition on Children and Weight, North County Health Link, and Palomar-Pomerado Hospital will co-sponsor the event.

But our region's children face other critical health problems.

Seventy-nine percent of 17-year-olds in America have suffered from tooth decay.

The most recent data on San Diego County children grades 2 through 5 is astounding. Thirty-percent had untreated cavities and 74 percent had active gun disease.

To help reverse this trend, we will expand the county's dental health program, called "Something to Smile About." This program targets low-income children who can least afford dental services. The program will provide additional preventative education, dental check-ups, and sealant clinics.

A stable home means a healthy family. Local law enforcement responded to 21,000 calls of domestic violence in 2004.

Law enforcement expenses related to domestic violence cost San Diego taxpayers more than \$5.5 million last year.

To fight this epidemic, last year Sheriff Bill Kolender, District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis, and I opened the North County Family Violence Prevention Center in San Marcos.

The center handled about 500 cases in the first eight months of operation. Frightened and desperate women seeking counseling and shelter have found help at this center.

As we approach the center's one-year anniversary, District Attorney Dumanis, Sheriff Kolender, and I pledge to actively pursue all available federal and state funds to expand these services because this center saves lives.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women over the age of 25.

I am honored to have been named San Diego County spokeswoman for the American Heart Association's "Go Red for Women" campaign.

Tonight, you may have noticed women in red dresses scattered throughout the audience. I'd like to ask these women to stand.

Many of these women have survived heart disease. Some have a loved one with heart disease. Others are health professionals who have dedicated their lives to prevention.

They proudly wear red dresses to join me in kicking off a yearlong county partnership with the American Heart Association to fight heart disease. Let's give them a round of applause.

We will begin this fight with a televised forum. Cardiologists and other health professional will educate the public on how to prevent heart disease.

To develop cutting-edge technology to stop the disease, the Heart Association will create a website for scientists and cardiologists to share information.

To get the best, we must innovate. So while we Go Red this year, the county must also go green.

Environmental protection makes good dollars and good sense. Our climate and 70 miles of beautiful coastline are among our top attractions.

Tourism results in a \$5.4 billion annual boost to our economy and supports 110,000 jobs.

Tourism produces taxes to fix our roads, keep our libraries open, and maintain our parks, among other services.

Therefore, maintaining our beaches is extremely important to our economy.

That's why, as the first piece of my 2005 Environmental Initiative, I have scheduled a Clean Beaches and Ocean Conference on June 22nd.

This event will bring together cities from throughout the region, and experts from throughout the nation, to discuss state-of-the-art solutions to sand replenishment and beach pollution problems.

For far too long the East Coast has received the lion's share of federal funds designated for sand replenishment. We are going to work hard to change that trend.

As a member of SANDAG's Shoreline Erosion Committee, I want to undertake an aggressive fight for beach sand. This effort can only work with a partnership of businesses, environmentalists, and the county's 18 cities.

We must first develop a Comprehensive Shoreline Plan.

Then we must organize an aggressive lobbying effort and partner with our congressional delegation to secure more federal funding for sand replenishment.

The county has two "green" buildings: the Cardiff Library and the new North County Animal Shelter, which opens later this year.

The Cardiff Library was the county's first green building. It is designed to be energy efficient. The library is constructed with recyclable materials, such as cork-lined floors and cotton insulation.

Our new animal shelter will feature a hydronic heating system whereby hot water is circulated throughout the kennel floors to keep the animals warm.

But we can do more. Therefore, the second of my goals this year in my Environmental Initiative is to expand the county's voluntary green building program. This program provides incentives for developers and homeowners to build with recycled construction materials and energy efficiency.

This effort has paid off. The county received the San Diego "Excellence in Energy" award for energy efficiency and conservation. With just two installations of solar voltaic panels we saved \$250,000 in one year!

Tonight, I'd like to offer an idea for a new county program, the All Green Permit Program, to give developers throughout the county an opportunity to build the region's first all green communities.

Build and all green community and permits are fast-tracked to save the builder money.

To qualify, a community must exceed 25 residential units and must the requirements of LEED.

LEED is a national standard for developing state-of-the-art energy efficient buildings.

More than 90 county parks provide 35,000 acres of public parkland.

To expand this we unanimously approved a new county trails program to expand our network of hiking and riding trails from 300 miles to more than 1,000.

More must be done, and this is what I propose:

The county has set aside land for species protection.

Under the Multiple Species Conservation Protection program 85,000 acres of open space have been kept from development.

This year, Supervisor Jacob and I plan to get us closer to our goal of 98,000 acres.

At the same time, I will lead an effort to raise money for an endowment fund to buy land to expand the San Dieguito River Park.

This 55-mile parks starts at the beach in Del Mar and extends to the mountains in Julian.

To do the best job for the public, partnering with others and sharing successful ideas is important:

As I mentioned earlier, from my travels it's clear that other counties face similar challenges. When I learn of new ideas other governments or private businesses are using, I bring those solutions back to my office to share. However, there is a better high-tech way to do this.

The County of San Diego should open an "Innovations" website to exchange ideas with counties, cities, and private industry across the country.

County funding will be needed to get this project up and running, and I will find the funds to do just that.

This new website will be a forum for ideas in good fiscal management, traffic solutions, and public protection.

Sharing innovative ideas can only assist the county to continue to live within its means.

Here's one partnership I'm proud of: This past Saturday, District Attorney Dumanis and I sponsored a conference on consumer protection. Experts on identity theft, fraud, and technology crimes came together to help county residents protect themselves. Over 1,500 people were in attendance.

This year, Supervisor Greg Cox will lead the California Association of Counties as its new president. By partnering with other counties, Supervisor Cox will help fight for budget stability in Sacramento.

Vice Chairman Bill Horn will continue his tremendous efforts with community advocates and schools to stop gang violence in North County. He is also working to create the San Luis Rey River Park. Vice Chairman Horn is to be commended for making this new park a community asset for residents in North County.

These may seem like lofty goals, but when this Board of Supervisors makes promises, we keep them.

In 1999, when I was last chairwoman, the board decided to maintain a reserve fund. I am happy to report that this fund is presently at \$590 million.

In 1999, I voiced the consensus of the board to prioritize improving our bond rating to create investment stability and borrowing capacity at lower rates. Today, we have the highest bond rating of any county in the state of California! That's something to be proud of.

We promised to keep costs down by demonstrating fiscal discipline while expanding services to the highest level in the county's history. And we have done just that!

We promised to upgrade the county's antiquated computer and phone network.

Now our county has been named the number one "Digital County" in the nation!

Assessor Greg Smith and Treasurer/Tax Collector Dan McAllister will soon process your real estate transactions electronically so they record faster!

We also improved our service to you by opening five new libraries, and new central animal shelter, and, with Sheriff Bill Kolender, we hired more than 225 new deputies and built a nationally recognized, state-of-the-art crime lab!

We built a boarding school for foster kids, called San Pasqual Academy, which just won a top award for innovation!

We will soon break ground on the new Edgemoor Hospital in Santee to help the severely disabled!

We are proud of the fact that we made promises, and we kept our promises!

As you may know, I have long been a strong supporter of the arts.

The economic value of the arts has always been underestimated. More San Diego residents purchase tickets to arts events than to all San Diego sports events combined.

Tourists attend performances, rent hotel rooms, and buy meals. In other words, they spend a lot of money.

The San Diego Opera and the San Diego Symphony recognize this. That's why they symphony will now be the official orchestra for the San Diego Opera.

In this, the 40th anniversary season of the opera, this is clearly an investment in quality and will attract even more exceptional talent to San Diego County.

We celebrate this historic accomplishment knowing it will ensure the next 40 years of the highest artistic standards.

Local theaters, such as the La Jolla Playhouse, produce the finest plays that debut here and then to become hits on Broadway.

Despite our potential for greatly expanded cultural tourism, only modest government support has been forthcoming. This must change!

The value of the arts to our souls and our well-being cannot be measured. It is the beauty of dance, music, and theater that reminds us that we are human.

When I was first elected supervisor, I said I'd like our region to sponsor its own Salzburg Festival. A region-wide arts celebration, like the festival in Austria, would bring our county and our arts international recognition.

I am extremely proud to announce that this year I am helping Mainly Mozart to produce a Year 2006 Mozart Festival, a celebration of Mozart's 250th birthday.

This will be the largest arts celebration in the history of the county.

We will hold free community concert, street fairs, and a June festival.

Mozart authors and lecturers, dance programs, and seaside concerts will encourage a love of the arts – and tourism from around the world.

And Maestro David Atherton will conduct the all-star Mainly Mozart Festival orchestra!

This arts and tourism industry partnership will turn our county into a world-renown cultural destination.

Let me close with this:

I believe the elected officials on this stage represent a county team like no other. We are all here to serve you.

You can be proud of this team.

We know that to provide the best county services at the lowest costs we must continue to be innovative, imaginative, and creative.

To compete, to succeed as a county, to find solutions and promote a prosperous future, to preserve and protect our quality of life, we must continue on the path of technology innovation and forge ahead with new ideas. We must be at the forefront of information sharing in the Information Age – we must partner with our citizens to the public good.

The style of this theater is known a black box. As I said earlier, it must be adapted for each production. It requires imagination. It is the perfect setting for the arts.

It is also the perfect metaphor for the future of San Diego County. We must think outside the box to achieve our goals.

The vibrancy, the vision, the imagination, the innovation that is the art of this theater is what is needed for the future of this county, and we are committed to this vision.

I want to thank our county employees for their dedicated service, and I want to thank my hard-working staff for all they do for me.

I especially want to thank my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors for their strong leadership on behalf of the residents of San Diego County.

I am honored that you are here this evening and thank you for supporting my term as chairwoman of the county Board of Supervisors.

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